DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 166 EA 030 474

TITLE	Current School and District Accreditation Procedures in the McREL Region: A Potential Support of Curriculum Reform.
INSTITUTION	Mid-Continent Regional Educational Lab., Aurora, CO.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1998-10-20
NOTE	17p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; *Accountability; *Accreditation (Institutions); *Curriculum Evaluation; Decision Making; *Educational Assessment; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Public Schools; *School Effectiveness; *Standards
IDENTIFIERS	Mid Continent Regional Educational Laboratory

ABSTRACT

This report provides a cross-state analysis of accreditation procedures and standards of the seven states in the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory region (Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming), with the intention of fostering dialogue among the states as they develop new policies and standards. This report has two main sections: a description of current and future accreditation policies in the states and region, and a presentation of domains and subdomains covered by each state's accreditation standards. A description of the accreditation procedures of the North Central Association, which are recognized as a valid substitute for state policies in many other states, appears in Appendix A. Standards are generally categorized as three types in this document: (1) input or resource standards refer to an enumeration of required items; (2) process standards are written as policies or require written policies; and (3) outcome standards require either that aggregated assessment results be reported, or that assessment results be used in the school-planning process. For example, most states require that student-assessment information be used as a part of an ongoing evaluation of the school-improvement process, and that these results be used to identify and measure progress toward school-improvement objectives. (DFR)

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ED 443 166

Current School and District Accreditation Procedures in the McREL Region: A Potential Support of Curriculum Reform

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October 20, 1998

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Current School Accreditation Procedures and Standards in the McREL Region: A Potential Support of Curriculum Reform

School accreditation has a long and distinguished history in the United States. Beginning in 1895, the Commission on Schools established standards that would assure the presence of quality programs in member schools.[1] Since that time, states have developed accreditation processes as a way of measuring the effectiveness of their public schools and as a means for providing school accountability. The accreditation process is a vehicle for states to communicate to their public that a quality education is being provided to students.

The states in the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory's (McREL) service area are currently redesigning their school accreditation processes. States are revising accreditation standards to include student achievement information in their multiple-indicator systems, thereby tying accreditation to curriculum and standards-based reform activities also taking place in these states. This report provides a cross-state analysis of accreditation procedures and standards of the seven states in the McREL region, with the intention of fostering dialogue among the states as they develop new policies and standards. This report has two main sections: a description of current and future accreditation policies in the states and region, and a presentation of domains and subdomains covered by each state's accreditation standards. A description of the accreditation procedures of North Central Association, which are recognized as a valid substitute for state policies in many of the states, appears in Appendix A.

Standards are generally categorized as three types in this document: **Input** or resource standards refer to an enumeration of required items. Examples include a specific number of new books in the school library, a roster of school course offerings, and minimum personnel credentials. **Process** standards are written as policies or require written policies. For example, all states in this region require schools and districts to have a written policy regarding assessment of student academic achievement.

Outcome standards require either that aggregated assessment results be reported, or that assessment results be used in the school planning process. For example, most states require that student assessment information be used as a part of an ongoing evaluation of the school improvement process, and that these results be used to identify and measure progress toward school improvement objectives. Thus, outcome standards do not necessarily require a specific level of performance on assessments for accreditation to be granted (although that is true in some areas), but outcome standards only require that measures of performance (e.g., student achievement, parent participation, school climate) be reported or used in school and district decision-making and planning.

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[1]Coy, R.L. & Hopfengardner, J.D. (1991). *Showcasing excellence: A case for elementary school regional accreditation.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI).

Although all three types of standards are common to most state accreditation programs, the focus in recent years has been on outcome standards, particularly on student outcomes associated with a school's or district's improvement plan. According to the Education Commission of the States, as of February 1994 there were 26 states with performance-based or outcome accreditation. Within McREL's region, each of the states has moved, to varying degrees, in the direction of outcomes-based accreditation. Outcome standards can include measurable performance indicators determined by the state, such as those in Missouri, or performance indicators that are locally determined.

Methodology

To understand the accreditation requirements in each of the states in McREL's region, accreditation documents from each of the states were collected and analyzed. Accreditation documents typically contain the state's policies and legislative rules pertaining to accreditation, the specific requirements a school and district must meet to become accredited, and information about the accreditation procedure a school and district must follow. The process used to review the documents was iterative and involved a content analysis of each state's accreditation requirements.

To facilitate the analysis of the accreditation requirements, a decision was made to create categories of standards and cluster the individual standards within specific categories. Several states already did this by grouping standards that shared a common theme such as leadership and governance. Because of the prominence and wide acceptance of the NCA categories and because of the inherent relationship of the individual accreditation requirements NCA clusters within each of its categories, the five NCA categories (School Improvement; Information Systems; Process of Schooling; Leadership and Governance; and Resources and Allocation) were adopted for the analysis. The accreditation requirements NCA clustered within its categories were used to guide the placement of state accreditation requirements. For example, North Dakota has a professional growth accreditation requirement that stipulates that a school board shall establish and implement a policy of professional growth for each teacher. Staff development is included in NCA's category called Process of Schooling, so North Dakota's accreditation requirement in this area was placed in this category.

When a state had an accreditation requirement that did not readily fit within the NCA classification system, a "best fit" criterion was employed. For example, NCA does not include a parent/family involvement accreditation requirement in any of its categories. A review of each state's Parent/Family Involvement accreditation requirements indicated a relationship between curriculum, instruction, and parent involvement (for example, in Colorado), so Parent/Family Involvement accreditation requirements were placed within the Process of Schooling category.

School and District Accreditation Requirements: A Changing Terrain

All of the states in the McREL region are in the midst of change in their accreditation policies and procedures. Even in Colorado, where accreditation is currently dependent, in part, on student achievement and performance standards, a new congressional bill requires the State

Board of Education to develop new accreditation indicators that include state-wide assessment program scores, by the end of 1998.

The move toward accreditation policies that include outcomes-based standards appears to be a response to changes in the state educational systems as a whole. For example, school district accreditation by the Missouri School Improvement Program requires gains or no changes in student achievement on the measures specified in its standards. As can be imagined, monitoring compliance with comprehensive input and process accreditation standards can be costly. (A description of general state monitoring procedures can be found in Appendix A.) The following is a description of the accreditation system in each of the McREL region's seven states.

Colorado. While a skeleton of school accreditation requirements are specified by the state, the Colorado State Board of Education extends the responsibility of managing school accreditation to each school district in the state. A required Enterprise Accreditation Contract (EAC) between the local board of education (the school district) and the State Board of Education is constructed, and accreditation can be granted to a district for up to a six-year period. The document specifies the standards, goals, and requirements to be met during the term of the contract.

District accreditation emphasizes local policy, management, and accountability. School accreditation emphasizes student performance results, school improvement planning, community involvement, and accountability and reporting. In general, the responsibility for developing, assessing, and meeting accreditation standards lies with the district in the Colorado accreditation system, and this system provides the means for accountability of districts to the state.

Colorado's accreditation system is increasingly becoming aligned with the model content standards adopted by the State Board of Education. A 1998 state congressional law links district and school accreditation to student performance on the Colorado Student Assessment Program's (CSAP) standards-based tests, among other indicators. These new accreditation indicators are to be established by the State Board of Education before December 1, 1998, according to the new legislation.

Colorado's Enterprise Accreditation Contract System

Accreditation Requirements	Process and Outcome Standards
Accreditation	Required by Regulation
Sanctions	Yes
Rewards or Recognition	Yes
Technical Assistance Based on Accreditation	Yes

Kansas. The Kansas State Board of Education's Quality Performance Accreditation (QPA) system also focuses on the continual improvement of students' academic performance. This accreditation system requires that all state schools construct a school improvement plan, in which three academic areas are targeted for the five-year accreditation cycle. Kansas requires the reporting of at least three aligned student achievement assessment results (including the state assessment program), school success indicators (e.g., graduation rates, student mastery measures, and attendance), and staff development plans. The state requires that the assessment data be used in constructing and revising the school improvement plan, and each school is visited twice during the accreditation term to support development of this plan.

Kansas' Quality Performance Accreditation System

Accreditation Requirements	Input, Process, and Outcome Standards
Accreditation	Required by Statute
Sanctions	Yes
Rewards or Recognition	Yes
Technical Assistance Based on Accreditation	Yes

Missouri. All Missouri school districts are required to be reviewed and accredited every five years by the Missouri School Improvement Program. As in Colorado and Kansas, student performance on state assessments is a component of accreditation, but the program requires districts to meet several other specific standards for accreditation. These standards have been organized by the state into three types: Resource Standards, Process Standards, and Performance Standards.

Resource standards are input standards concerned with the basic requirements of services and materials that all districts must meet. These include requirements regarding staff certification, class size, high school graduation, course offerings, and amount of class time devoted to subject areas at all grade levels. The *process standards* are concerned more with specific aspects of curriculum, instruction, and learning environments. They include, for example, standards on curriculum, instruction, school climate, media centers, guidance and counseling, governance and administration, professional development, and facilities. *Performance standards* include improvement or maintenance of student performance in four domains: academic achievement, reading achievement, career preparation, and educational persistence.

An important component of the Missouri School Improvement Program is each district's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan. This plan is to guide the district in decision-making about the resource and process standards that are intended to lead to higher student performance.

Missouri's School Improvement Program	
Accreditation Requirements	Input, Process, and Outcome Standards
Accreditation	Required by Statute
Sanctions	Yes
Rewards or Recognition	Yes
Technical Assistance Based on Accreditation	Yes

Nebraska. Nebraska's Accreditation Regulations are worded as requirements and quality indicators, and school district accreditation is granted for one year at a time. The majority of Nebraska's accreditation requirements are input-based and the quality indicators are statements that describe conditions which contribute to high-performance learning. Nebraska currently has no state regulations regarding standards-based accountability, and therefore accreditation is currently not tied to student achievement of standards. The accreditation requirements are scheduled to be reviewed in December of 1999, when aligning them to new state standards and the developing assessment program will be discussed.

It falls to Nebraska's voluntary Framework for School Improvement, a systematic approach to self-sustained improvement efforts, to provide evidence about student performance. The purpose of the framework is to assist schools in becoming more effective in bringing about improved learning for all students. The procedure schools are encouraged to follow is intended to be a continuous process extending over approximately five years. The process incorporates the elements of Nebraska's Model for High Performance Learning that promotes quality learning, equity, and accountability.

Nebraska's School District Accreditation System	
Accreditation Requirements	Input, Process, and Outcome Standards
Accreditation	Required by Statute
Sanctions	Yes
Rewards or Recognition	No
Technical Assistance Based on Accreditation	No

North Dakota. In North Dakota, school accreditation has two components: required statutory compliance with specific input standards (for example, number of school days in the year, teacher certification, subject offerings, and safety codes) and voluntary accreditation standards that include a school improvement process. A school improvement plan required for

accreditation outlines a seven-year cycle of school progress, and North Central Accreditation can be substituted for this process. Nearly 50% of public elementary schools were accredited in 1997. To a large extent, local school boards are involved in disseminating a standards-based curriculum in North Dakota, and accreditation is not currently part of an accountability system.

North Dakota's Education Improvement Process	
Accreditation Requirements	Input, Process, and Outcome Standards
Accreditation	Voluntary
Sanctions	Yes
Rewards or Recognition	Yes
Technical Assistance Based on Accreditation	No

South Dakota. The required school district accreditation in South Dakota is based mainly on input standards such as the annual school calendar, daily school schedule, staff certification, course offerings, high school graduation requirements, and assessment requirements. School district accreditation in South Dakota is for a four-year-term.

During the 1998-99 school year, South Dakota is revising its accreditation system to a model based on a school improvement plan and process.

South Dakota's School District Accreditation System	
Accreditation Requirements	Input, Process, and Outcome Standards
Accreditation	Required by Statute
Sanctions	No
Rewards or Recognition	No
Technical Assistance Based on Accreditation	No

Wyoming. Like Colorado, Kansas, and Missouri, Wyoming has moved toward accreditation based on student performance standards. Development and implementation of district performance standards in the state's areas of Common Core of Knowledge and Skills provides the foundation for the other accreditation standards. Districts and schools are required to demonstrate assessment of performance standards, use performance standards as criteria for high school graduation, and base staff development, school improvement, parent involvement, and fiscal plans on achieving student performance standards. Development of and decisions

regarding performance standards are made at the district level in Wyoming, but a focus on standards is central to district accreditation. Thus, unlike in Kansas, Colorado, and Missouri schools and districts, which are required to demonstrate progress in terms of student performance, Wyoming districts are required to have a system of performance standards and assessment in place, but outcomes are not included in the Wyoming accreditation criteria. Annual accreditation, which includes a monitoring team visit to the district approximately every five years, is a requirement of school districts in Wyoming.

Wyoming is currently developing a state assessment program, which will provide the opportunity to include a consistent set of student performance results in its accreditation system, should they choose to head in that direction.

Wyoming's School Accreditation System

Accreditation Requirements	Process and Outcome Standards
Accreditation	Required by Statute
Sanctions	Yes
Rewards or Recognition	Yes
Technical Assistance Based on Accreditation	Yes

The McREL Region. In conclusion, most states in the McREL region have school and district accreditation requirements that currently include school improvement plans based on performance standards and student achievement. Accreditation is becoming a part of a more seamless system in each of the region's states, with at least three states choosing to incorporate their state assessment program results into their accreditation decisions. Other states wish to include assessment results into their accreditation system, but some of these states have not yet developed an assessment program. Nonetheless, it is clear that states in this region are focusing on districts' adoption of student performance standards and demonstration of implementing standards-based instruction, to the degree that states are including these activities in their accreditation systems. Thus, accreditation can be a powerful means toward implementing standards-based education and targeting technical assistance to the right districts and children.

An Analysis of State Accreditation Standards

The analysis described above led to the identification of 36 accreditation areas that fit into five domains of standards. The five domains are the following: School Improvement, Information Systems, Process of Schooling, Leadership and Governance, and Resources and Allocation. A description of each accreditation domain can be found in Appendix B. The following table lists the domains and standard areas, and for each area in which a state has a standard, that standard was categorized as an input, process, or output standard using the criteria mentioned in the methodology section.

Accreditation standard by state and type (I=Input, P=Process, or O=Output)

Standard	State						
School Improvement	**CO**	**KS**	**MO**	**NE**	**ND**	**SD**	**WY**
School Improvement Process	P/O	P/O	P	P	P/O		P/O
Evaluation of School Improvement Process	O	O	O	P	O		O
School Advisory	P						
Information Systems	**CO**	**KS**	**MO**	**NE**	**ND**	**SD**	**WY**
School Reporting Requirements (to state and/or community)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Student Academic Performance	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Post-Secondary School Status				O			
Post-Elementary School Status			O				
Educational Persistence	O	O	O				
Equity	O						O
Accomplishments of School	O						
Student Records						P	
Learning Climate	O			O			P/O
Career Preparation	O		O				
Community Satisfaction	O		O	O			
Process of Schooling	**CO**	**KS**	**MO**	**NE**	**ND**	**SD**	**WY**
Curriculum		I/P	I/P/O	I/P	I/P/O*	I	P/O
Instruction		I	P/O	I/P	I/P	I	

Accreditation standard by state and type (I=Input, P=Process, or O=Output)							
Standard	**State**						
Process of Schooling (cont.)	**CO**	**KS**	**MO**	**NE**	**ND**	**SD**	**WY**
Staff Development	P	P/O	I/P/O	I/P	I/P		P/O
Assessment	P	I/P	P	P	P	P	P
Pupil Personnel Services			I/P/O	I/P	I/P		I
Student Activities			P/O				
Distance Education				I/P		P	
Support Services			P				I
Parent/Family Involvement	P		P/O				P/O
Class Size			I	I	I		
School Climate	O		P/O	O			O
Supplemental Programs	P		I/P/O	I/P			I/P/O
Teacher Preparation Time			I		I		
Leadership and Governance	**CO**	**KS**	**MO**	**NE**	**ND**	**SD**	**WY**
Leadership-Governance	P/O		P/O	P		P	P
School/District Policies			P	P	P		
Resources and Allocation	**CO**	**KS**	**MO**	**NE**	**ND**	**SD**	**WY**
Space and Facilities			P	P		P	
Personnel and Staffing	P	P	I/P/O	I	I	P	
Finances			I/P				P/O
Library Media Services	P		I/P	I	I/P		I
Student Enrollment (Compulsory and/or Entitlement)				P		P	
Alternative School Calendar						P/O	
State Tournaments						P	

* North Dakota's accreditation code includes an outline of optional curriculum standards that are outcomes-based.

As the previous table illustrates, the range of accreditation requirements for each of the states in the region is considerable. On the high end, Missouri has 26 accreditation requirements; in contrast, Kansas mandates that only ten be met. Clearly, both states are concerned with assuring the public that high caliber education is provided to all students. In addition, both states undertook an extensive process to revise their accreditation requirements as part of comprehensive statewide education reform initiatives, using a review process gathered feedback from educators and other stakeholders.

The trend toward accrediting schools based on student and school performance is evident when the outcomes standards presented in Table 1 are considered. Specifically, school improvement plans are often required to be based on assessments of student achievement and community satisfaction, and these plans usually require an evaluation of the school improvement program effects on student achievement (often in targeted areas such as reading and math). Colorado, Missouri, and Wyoming are all requiring the assessment of over 10 types of outcome standards.

Discussion

State accrediting systems are a potential means toward implementing curriculum reform. By focusing on student achievement toward performance standards within a school or district, the accreditation process can ensure that only schools accomplishing what they intend to accomplish are open to the public. Indeed, many states are requiring assessment of student progress with respect to local standards and use this information in their accreditation decision.

This process of accrediting schools based on student learning sounds good in theory, but a requirement for implementing such a program successfully is that school districts receive the help they need in constructing performance standards, assessing student performance towards meeting those standards, and designing effective standards-based curriculum. Only three states explicitly mention in their regulations that non-accredited schools will receive the assistance that they need. In many states in this region (e.g., Wyoming, which is currently developing state standards), it is up to individual districts to undertake the timely and demanding process of developing standards and choosing assessments, a task that is too large for districts to complete without assistance.

States with a statewide assessment program may be in a better position than others to consistently accredit schools and districts based on performance. The states in McREL's region are all moving towards the adoption of statewide assessment programs, so accreditation could include results from these programs in the future (as Nebraska plans to do). The ongoing changes in accreditation in the region's states are promising. These changes suggest that school and district accreditation is truly becoming a part of systemic education reform in these states.

Appendix A: Monitoring Accreditation and North Central Association Accreditation

Monitoring Accreditation Standards

In addition to determining accreditation standards, states also determine how their accreditation standards will be monitored. State departments of education have the responsibility for monitoring the state's accreditation program. Typically, a variety of methods is employed that together provide information about whether the requirements for accreditation in each of the areas have been met. Depending on the type of standard, information is gathered and reported differently. For example, data on outcome-based standards generally are collected and reported to the state on an annual basis. States use the information to determine if standards have been met, then they typically aggregate the school-level data to develop district and state profiles.

In contrast, data on input and process standards usually are gathered at the school-building level and become part of a school's self-study process. This information is also sent to the state department of education. State department of education personnel also conduct on-site reviews on a scheduled basis to districts throughout the state to review schools' and districts' documentation that accreditation standards have been met.

Schools are accredited on the basis of their meeting the requirements in each of the standards. A school is accredited for a period of time designated by each state department of education. Based on the analysis of the information gathered for each school, a school is classified in one of several accreditation categories such as accredited, accredited-warned, accreditation withdrawn or discontinued, and accreditation dropped, depending on its ability to meet the conditions for accreditation. Some states prioritize their standards into categories, such as required and optional standards, and base their classification on a school having met, for example, all of the required standards and a percentage of the optional standards.

When accreditation is denied, some type of penalty, such as rescission of funding, may be imposed if the school is unable to demonstrate progress toward meeting unmet standards in a given period of time. Accreditation standards also include an appeals process. Rewards may be made to schools that exceed the minimum requirements for accreditation. In some states such as Kansas, school boards are encouraged to write letters of commendation to schools and to publicize an exemplary accreditation status.

North Central Association Accreditation

The North Central Association (NCA) is a school accreditation and evaluation organization that states may elect to use as an accrediting agency. A state may decide that NCA accreditation can substitute for other state accreditation procedures, or a state may require that all schools meet NCA requirements. Unless a state dictates otherwise, schools may choose on their own to be accredited through NCA. Although none of the states in McREL's region rely solely on the NCA to accredit all of their schools, individual schools throughout McREL's region are members of NCA.

NCA's overarching standard–to maximize the proportion of promoted or graduated students who are self-directed learners and are prepared to make successful school-to-school or school-to-work transitions–is based on its single overriding commitment to excellence. To receive NCA accreditation, standards must be met in five major categories: School Improvement; Information Systems; Process of Schooling; Leadership and Governance; and Resources and Allocation. Within each standard there are specific "membership" and "improvement" requirements entitled "criteria."

The membership criteria are those requirements considered to be essential to the function of a school and are required to be met by all member schools. The improvement criteria are statements of exemplary practice and are considered necessary for a school to initiate and sustain a program improvement effort focusing on improved student performance.

After achieving "initial membership," a school must begin an improvement cycle and pursue one of three endorsements–school improvement, outcomes, or transitions. Each of the endorsements shares similarities; where they differ is in the focus of the goals and the frequency of the peer review team visits. For example, in the school improvement endorsement, a majority of the goals must focus on improved student learning; in the outcomes endorsement, all targeted goals must focus on improved student learning. For the transitions endorsement, some goals are prescribed by NCA.

When a school elects to be accredited by NCA and the state also has accreditation requirements, the school must meet both sets of accreditation requirements. Most often, the two sets of requirements are consistent in the type of data to be gathered and reported. However, this is not always the case. For example, Wyoming has state accreditation standards with different reporting requirements than NCA requires, so NCA member schools in Wyoming must collect and report two types of data.

Appendix B: Summary of Accreditation Categories

School Improvement

School improvement is a major accreditation standard for nearly every state in the region. In states with a school improvement standard, elements of the required school improvement process can be found in almost all of the state's other standards. To satisfy the accreditation standard of *School Improvement*, a school must be actively engaged in a continuous improvement process that focuses on program and learner outcomes. For each state with a school improvement standard, schools must be involved in a school improvement process which includes several stages or phases. Typically, these stages are the following: development of school goals and objectives; formation of advisory and working committees; development of a school program evaluation; collection and analysis of appropriate school and community data; development of a school profile and research-based school improvement plan; implementation of the plan; and development of a schedule for ongoing review, documentation and reporting of the plan's implementation. Schools are encouraged to use a collaborative approach during each phase of the improvement process and to include community representatives as well as students, teachers, administrators, and school board members on advisory or steering committees.

Although each of the seven states requires, as part of its school improvement planning process, that an advisory or steering committee be formed to oversee school improvement activities, Colorado's School Advisory standard goes one step further by requiring a school advisory accountability committee that serves as a conduit for information between the school and the community. The committee works with the principal and the community in the school improvement process and reports achievement and program activity information to the community. The committee also makes recommendations to the principal of the school regarding the prioritization of expenditures of school district monies.

Information Systems

The accreditation category titled *Information Systems* includes standards that pertain to the creation and use of a school and/or district reporting system that is comprehensive and current. Such a system typically is designed to address questions about student performance and the school's performance which ask for a comparison of one school's students with other school's students. Some states such as North Dakota include this type of reporting system as part of their school improvement standard. When this occurs, data gathered as part of the school improvement process are reported systematically to the same audiences that receive the performance data identified for information systems. For example, data are typically gathered and reported to the district, school board, and larger community in both categories of standards on students who have dropped out of the educational program, on students who have been promoted or who graduated from the school, on students who have made successful transitions from one level of schooling to another, and on changes in student performance over time. Follow-up studies are also conducted on specific populations of students.

Data for the Information System's category may exceed that collected as part of a school improvement process. For example, Colorado requires that schools report annually on accomplishments in areas such as school support for and recognition of excellent teachers, as well as school preparation of students to live effectively in a society that is globally competitive. Missouri requires that its districts report information to the public about their educational programs and services, as well as about staff members who participate in local community organizations and activities. South Dakota, by contrast, narrowly defines the type of records that must be kept by districts; its Student Record Standard stipulates that a record-keeping system to report on student scholarship and attendance must be maintained for each student throughout the time the student is enrolled in South Dakota schools.

Process of Schooling

The *Process of Schooling* category of accreditation standards refers to the educational programs developed by schools that reflect the characteristics of the school community and that increase the intellectual, personal, physical, social, and career development of the students they serve. The standards in this category require that school programs be designed to accommodate students of varying levels of development, prepare students to be productive citizens in a democratic society, and enable students to become self-directed learners. Schools also must promote a positive climate for learning that focuses on academic achievement. This includes, for many states, accreditation requirements that stipulate the development of student learning goals and the design of appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities to meet the needs of a diverse and occasionally dispersed learner population.

Several states (North Dakota, Nebraska, and Missouri) require that counseling and guidance systems be in place to assist students (Pupil Personnel) , while others (Missouri, Wyoming) stipulate that programs for at-risk students, migrant students, and non-English speaking students be available in order for a school to become accredited. In Colorado, Missouri, and Wyoming, parents and members of the community are expected to actively participate in the learning process. Nebraska and Missouri also mandate a maximum class-size requirement. To ensure that the teaching staff is responsive to the unique needs of the students and to the characteristics of the educational program, several states require that their schools have a staff development program that is connected to and supportive of the school's improvement plan.

Leadership and Governance,

The accreditation category *Leadership and Governance* includes standards that provide the umbrella for what goes on in schools: all of the programs and services provided to students and their families. This typically is framed as a school's vision and includes a school's mission statement, its goals, and current improvement initiatives. The mission and goals statements clarify the purpose of the school and generally include identification of the programs and expected outcomes in the school improvement plan. In Missouri, for example, the district's mission and goals are consistently applied to district management decisions and are reflected in the instructional program, the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, the curriculum, and

other support services offered by the district. States may also require that a school or district governing board develop policies appropriate to the needs of the school/district. When this occurs, dissemination of the policies takes various forms. For example, North Dakota requires that teachers, students, and parents be given a handbook that describes the school's and district's policies.

Resources and Allocation

The *Resources and Allocation* accreditation category includes standards that pertain to school and district resource inputs. In contrast to school outcomes, such as student performance levels that are characteristic of school improvement plans, inputs are what enable schools and districts to operate effectively and efficiently. The amount of time allocated for student learning and staff development; the size, configuration, and condition of the space and facilities utilized by schools; the safety of the school environment; the quality and number of appropriately assigned school staff; the sufficiency of financial resources to operate the school/district; and opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular activities are inputs that influence how well a school is able to conduct its business. For example, sufficient financial resources must be available to provide adequate space, people, time, materials, and instructional programs to maximize the potential for all students. Standards in these areas ensure that schools are able to attain their goals.

In certain standards areas such as Space and Facilities or Personnel and Staffing, some states provide general guidelines for meeting the standard while others have very specific requirements. For example, in Nebraska, to meet the Space and Facilities Standard, each school must maintain safe, healthful, and sanitary conditions and meet safety and health codes. Missouri, by contrast, requires that health and safety codes be met and that long- and short-term facilities and safety plans be in place that include the designation of a safety coordinator who is responsible for monitoring all aspects of safety. In Missouri, facility plans are incorporated into the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan. Personnel and Staffing standards also range from general to specific. For example, in Kansas and Colorado, the standard in this area stipulates that staff must hold the appropriate certificate for their professional assignment. Other states such as North Dakota and Missouri specify the type of certificate required for each professional position, as well as stipulate the number of professional staff to be assigned to each school level according to the number of students enrolled. Similar differences in level of specificity of the requirements to meet standards may be found among states in the other standards areas in this category.